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THE NEWSWEEKLY OF THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY
SECOND CLASS
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Cheers, fears for disabilities act

Lobbyists win battle for AIDS clause but fret over loose legal language

by Peter Romeo

WASHINGTON — Although foodservice won a major battle in its struggle to modify the landmark disabled-rights legislation recently approved by Congress, the war's outcome was a disappointment, according to industry leaders.

The officials said they championed the Americans with Disabilities Act's goal of making restaurants and other public places more accessible to disabled employees and customers, but they bemoaned the mandate's ambiguous language.

Their disappointment was tempered by the industry's success in putting into the ADA a provision that permits restaurateurs to move staffers with AIDS and other communicable diseases into jobs where their presence would be less alarming to patrons.

But even with the special provision, the ADA is "comprehensive, far-reaching legislation that will affect every aspect of our business," Stephen Elmont, chairman of the National Restaurant Association's Government Relations Committee, said at the association's annual convention in Chicago.

The bill could require such changes as outfitting point-of-sale systems with braille keys, providing special phones for the hearing impaired, widening dining-room doors and adding wheelchair ramps.

The NRA has maintained that restaurateurs would be confused about their obligations under the ADA because its language is very obscure.

For instance, the bill would require restaurants and other public businesses to make "reasonable accommodations" for handicapped staffers and patrons.

Yet the term is not defined adequately within the law, according to the NRA, which joined a number of groups in

*(See **DISABILITIES**, page 99)*

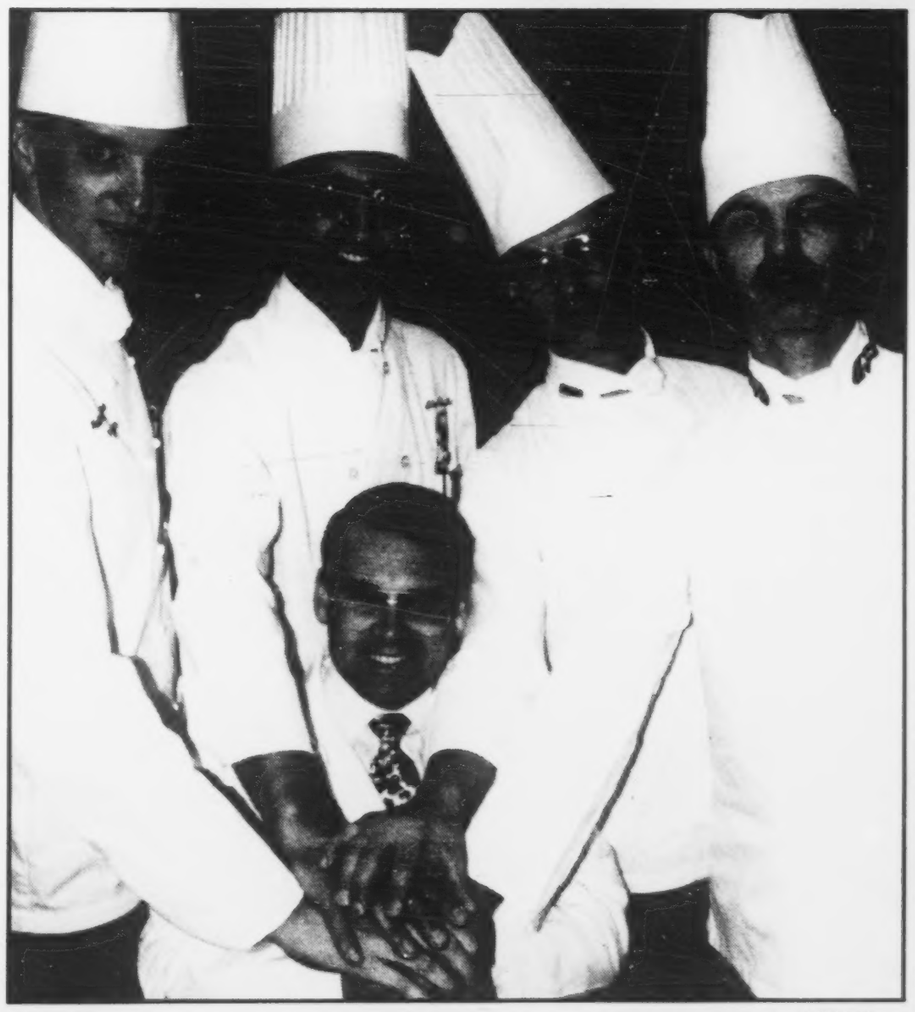
Americans with Disabilities Act: Key provisions

Permits foodservice employers to move staffers with AIDS or other communicable diseases into a job not involving handling of food.

Requires existing public facilities remove barriers to the handicapped except in situations where "undue hardship" is entailed.

Prohibits discrimination against the disabled when staffers are hired or promoted.

NRA SHOW SPECIAL REPORT



NRN Photo

Team manager Keith Keogh, seated, and the 1992 US Culinary Olympic Team. From left, Keith Coughenour, Alex Darvishi, Franz Poepperl and Michael Russell.

NRA rolls image campaigns; 'Glad you're here' reprised

by Peter Romeo

CHICAGO — Gathering here for foodservice's first full-scale meeting of the 1990s, industry leaders detailed plans to protect restaurants' interests in the new decade by embellishing the trade's image.

The officials, who converged here for the National Restaurant Association's annual convention, said they would wield the industry's marketing savvy to combat softening sales, a shortage of workers and criticism of restaurants' ecological sensitivity.

For instance, association executives aired hopes of invigorating sluggish sales through an industrywide promotion depicting operators as eager, appreciative hosts. Themed "We're Glad You're Here," the marketing campaign is a reprise of a traffic push waged by the National Restaurant Association in the early 1970s to counter an economic downturn.

"If the entire industry gets behind this promotion, it will lead to more sales not only for participating restaurants but for the industry as a whole,"

*(See **NRA**, page 99)*

IFMA Gold-Plates 'Pete' Harman

by Peter O. Keegan

CHICAGO — Leon W. "Pete" Harman, the maverick Kentucky Fried Chicken franchisee who helped build Colonel Sanders' secret recipe into the world's most successful chicken empire, won the International Foodservice Manufacturer Association Gold Plate Award here, distinguishing him as Foodservice Operator of the Year.

"What a great industry we're in," proclaimed the euphoric Harman after receiving a standing ovation from the audience and congratulatory hugs and kisses from his fellow honorees at the IFMA Silver Plate dais.

Harman was selected from among nine Sil-

*(See **HARMAN**, page 98)*

See 8 other Silver Plate winners
Page 98

4 top chefs score spots on US Culinary Olympics team

by Jack Hayes

CHICAGO — A saucier from West Virginia, a food consultant from Oregon and a pair of club chefs from Ohio and Michigan earned spots on the 1992 Culinary Team USA by outcooking their regional competitors in the Olympic tryout finals.

Topping their respective regions during a competition held at the National Restaurant Association's 71st annual show here were the following:

- Michael Russell of the Sky-

*(See **CULINARY**, page 4)*

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NEWS BRIEFS

Bush official urges nationwide ban on cigarette vending

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration's top health officer has called for a nationwide ban on cigarette vending machines, which can generate several thousand dollars annually for a restaurant or tavern.

Louis Sullivan, secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, endorsed the prohibition as a means of keeping cigarettes out of minors' hands.

With an eye toward the same goal, many cities and counties have already outlawed cigarette vending devices. Others have proposed legislation that would require restaurants and other places with a vending unit to screen its customers.

Full-service restaurants with total annual sales of $2 million per year typically reap an average of $5,000 in commissions from their cigarette vending machines, according to the accounting firm Laventhol & Horwath.

Puck uncorks Eureka brew-pub

LOS ANGELES — Wolfgang Puck and his partners in the new Los Angeles Brewing Co. have opened their long-awaited Eureka restaurant at the brewery.

Complementing its Eureka-brand amber lager on draft, the 180-seat restaurant offers an international menu of full-flavored specialties, including innovative sausage varieties, chicken and duck chili in tortilla-lined bowls, Thai-spiced lobster dumplings, pizzas and Austrian-regional dishes — such as cheese and potato ravioli in brown butter — from the recipe files of Puck's grandmother and mother.

Although Puck expects check averages to be half those of his renowned Spago here, or about $20 to $25, Eureka's kitchen indulges in such labor-intensive practices as making its own sausages, salami, cheeses, black bread and pastries. Jody Denton is Eureka's chef.

Government finds poor food handling in nursing homes

WASHINGTON — A government study of nursing homes found that more than one-third of the institutions failed to meet federal requirements for sanitary handling of food.

About 6,000 of 15,600 nursing homes inspected did not meet federal standards for storing, refrigerating, preparing, distributing and serving food under sanitary conditions, according to the survey. The 93-volume report also said that more than 20 percent of the homes did not administer prescription drugs properly.

Nursing home industry officials said the reports may be misleading since they do not gauge the degree to which care is below standards, and they are subjective because they examine just a few of the areas that inspectors check.

McDonald's tests pasta dishes

SCRANTON, Pa. — In its latest test of alternative dinner fare, McDonald's is selling several types of pasta in five units here after 4 p.m.

Items being offered include such staples as spaghetti with meatballs and lasagna.

The quick-serve giant, which has been actively exploring ways to boost dinner traffic for many months, is testing pizza in about 200 units.

Universal Studios storms Orlando

ORLANDO, Fla. — Universal Studios Florida, a $600 million entertainment complex, expects to serve 30,000 to 40,000 covers out of more than a dozen restaurants, snack carts and kiosks when its movie-themed doors swing open to central Florida's vacationers and business tourists this Thursday.

Concepts like Mel's Drive-In, a diner from the movie "American Graffiti," and Studio Commissary, a California-inspired tablecloth restaurant, join with a Mexican bistro called Cafe La Bamba, a 280-seat trattoria named Louie's, an Irish pub called Finnegan's and a memory-inspiring Schwab's Pharmacy.

Mecca Leisure USA, the Orlando-based entertainment-dining group that owns Hard Rock International, will operate a giant guitar-shaped Hard Rock Cafe and a 400-seat seafood palace called Lombard's Landing on site.

National parks set to hike contractor fees

WASHINGTON — Contract feeders that run facilities in national parks are bracing for an increase in the commissions they pay the government for the privilege of operating on public land.

U.S. Interior Minister Manuel Lujan Jr. has disclosed plans to raise the fees and use the additional revenues for the upkeep of parks.

In an interview with The New York Times, he said he would hike the charges substantially but did not specify how much of an increase he would seek.

Contract feeders that operate national parks' feeding facilities typically pay 2.5 percent of the outlets' gross revenues to the government.

Senate committee backs mandatory seafood inspection

WASHINGTON — Mandatory inspection of seafood drew a step nearer to becoming a reality when the Senate Agriculture Committee recently threw its support behind the cause.

The committee approved a bill that would require fish caught for human consumption to be scrutinized as diligently as meat and poultry are inspected under current statutes.

Unlike those commodities, seafood is not routinely examined by government inspectors. Because the inspection of fish and shellfish is voluntary rather than mandatory, only 7 percent of the nation's 2,000 seafood processors submit their catch to the Food and Drug Administration for examination, according to Sen. Patrick Healy, D-Vt.

Consumer advocates and many industry groups have asked the government to mandate the inspection of all seafood. However, the government has noted that it does not have the funding necessary to expand the programs currently used for poultry and meat.

Judge rules in favor of paternity leave

PITTSBURGH — While the industry battles federal legislation that would in effect extend maternity-leave rights to fathers, a judge here has ruled that employers in three states will have to begin offering the benefit to men if they already offer it to women.

The decision affects businesses in Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey. Places with fewer than 15 employees are exempted.

The ruling, by the Third U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, forces employers in those states to provide the same unpaid leave to fathers as they already provide to the mothers of newborns. The person would also be guaranteed a job upon return from the furlough.

The decision was handed down while foodservice lobbyists were bracing for the Senate's consideration of federal parental-leave legislation already approved by the House.

KFC International taps Huston as new prexy

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Kentucky Fried Chicken has named former Pizza Hut senior operations vice president Allen S. Huston president of KFC International.

Huston follows Donald L. Pierce, who has resigned to become president of Pentagram Corp., a Hawaii-based firm that operates Burger King restaurants and a restaurant distribution business.

Huston's new post marks his fourth position with Pepsico, parent company of KFC, Pizza Hut and Taco Bell. Prior to his five-year stint at Pizza Hut, Huston was a manufacturing vice president at Pepsi-Cola Bottling Group and a distribution vice president at Frito-Lay.

KFC owns and franchises approximately 3,000 outlets outside the U.S.

FINANCIAL NEWS

Wall Street cheers ShowBiz for turnaround

by Milford Prewitt

IRVING, Texas — Dick Frank seems apologetic for using such shopworn clichés as "getting back to basics" and "working to please the customer."

But those are the phrases that pepper his answers when Wall Street and the press call to get the recipe for the turnaround he has led.

Frank, chairman and chief executive officer of ShowBiz Pizza Time Inc., operator of the 259-unit ShowBiz Pizza and Chuck E. Cheese amusement-pizza chains and 26 Monterey's Tex-Mex Cafe restaurants, is at the helm of a comeback that evokes the amazement of even Wall Street veterans.

In fact, the rebound of the company has attracted so many investors — driving ShowBiz's stock price from $6.25 a year ago to $25.25 most recently — that one analyst is afraid to give the company's stock a "buy" recommendation until it cools off a bit.

"I don't have a buy recommendation because the stock price has moved up so fast," said Dave Geraty, an analyst with Equitable Securities in Nashville, Tenn.

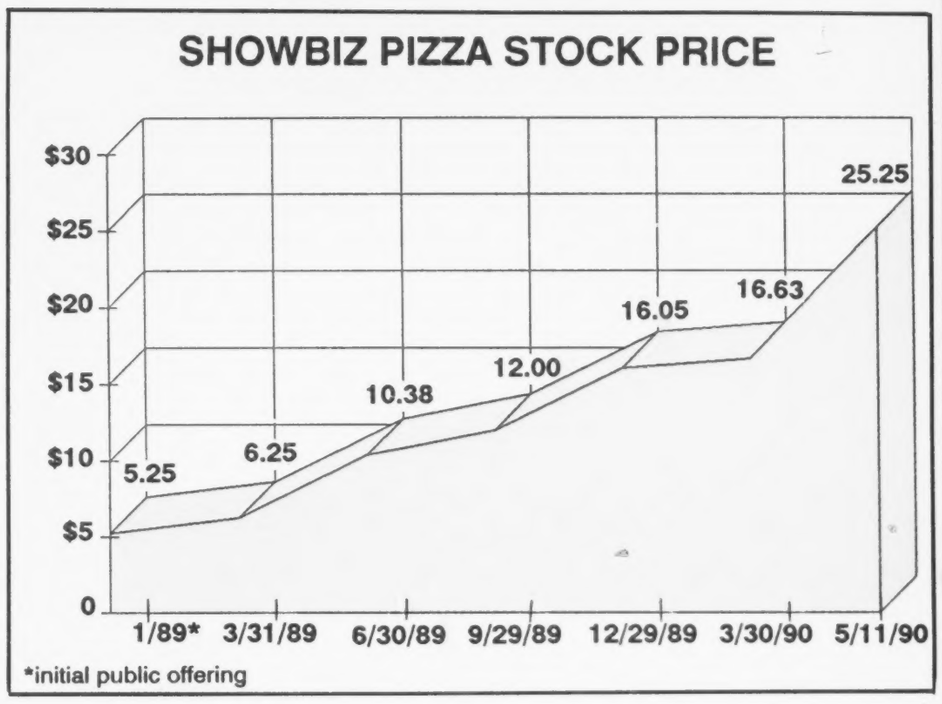
"It may be that since the stock market is doing so well, ShowBiz is a beneficiary of that momentum. I'm waiting for the market and the share price to pull back a bit," he said. "But what's going on there is a great story."

"It's the classic turnaround, a company with virtually no earnings coming up with substantial earnings growth in a short period of time," said Dennis Telzrow, an analyst with Eppler Guerin Turner Inc. in Dallas.

"It's the kind of company people did not know about and what they did know was negative," he said. "Now everyone is interested because of the earnings acceleration."

For its fiscal year ended Dec. 29, ShowBiz wiped out a $225,000 year-ago loss to make a $2.5 million profit on an 11-percent gain in revenues, to $167.4 million.

During the fourth quarter of 1989, earnings per share were $1.23. But had the company not taken a $4.5 million charge linked to the closing of 29 Monterey restaurants, earnings per share would have been as high as $2.15, analysts say.



The company has finished the first quarter showing even stronger numbers.

For the period ended March 30, net income soared 90 percent, to $4.8 million, on a 7-percent rise in revenues, to $47.4 million.

"The impressive thing is that the company's earnings still doubled despite the charge," Geraty said.

Frank said the resurgent ShowBiz is profiting from a strategic plan three year old strategic plan whose implementation is starting to pay off.

"I know people hear this all the time, but I guess it's just the old deal of getting back to the basics," Frank said. "In the last three to five years we just worked real hard to get to understand our customers, and we worked real hard to please them."

Five years ago Showbiz and Chuck E. Cheese were struggling subsidiaries of the Brock Corp., now known as Integra. Monterey was in Chapter 11 when Integra bought it in 1987.

All three restaurant subsidiaries, Chuck E. Cheese in particular, nearly brought Integra to the brink of insolvency before the parent company decided to divest the pizza operations in December 1988 through a stock swap with shareholders, leaving the company in the hands of restaurant management.

At the time of the deal, ShowBiz paid an additional $11 million to Integra for Monterey. Then ShowBiz went public in January 1989, hitting the market with an initial share price of $5.25.

At that time Frank and a new executive management corps went to work to concentrate on improving both ShowBiz's and Chuck E. Cheese's appeal to families. But they also discovered that Monterey was a drag on the company, draining about $500,000 a year in losses.

The company responded to the hemorrhage in October 1989 by closing 26 of 52 units, the source for the $4.5 million charge, and converting the remainder into a trendier and more upscale Tex-Mex competitor in the dinner-house segment.

Identical in all but name and geographic concentration, ShowBiz and Chuck E. Cheese have enjoyed 17 consecutive quarters of increased same-store sales, ending the fourth quarter with comparable-store sales up 8.3 percent. "I think people have come to view us as a family entertainment center," Frank said. "We have the niche practically to ourselves."

Slowing imports push ham prices up

by Patt Patterson

Domestic **ham** prices continue to rise, partly because of the slowing down of imports.

Most of the Eastern bloc countries that supplied the United States with hams are diverting their production to feeding their own people. Romania cut off all ham exports this year.

Poland, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia are all cutting back export shipments and raising prices.

Cling peaches are benefiting from a good crop forecast this year. California canners are providing truckload allowances, $1-$1.25 per case, until June on current foodservice inventories.

Truckload allowances are also being given by some of California's canners on 6/10 **apricots**, up to $1.25 per case.

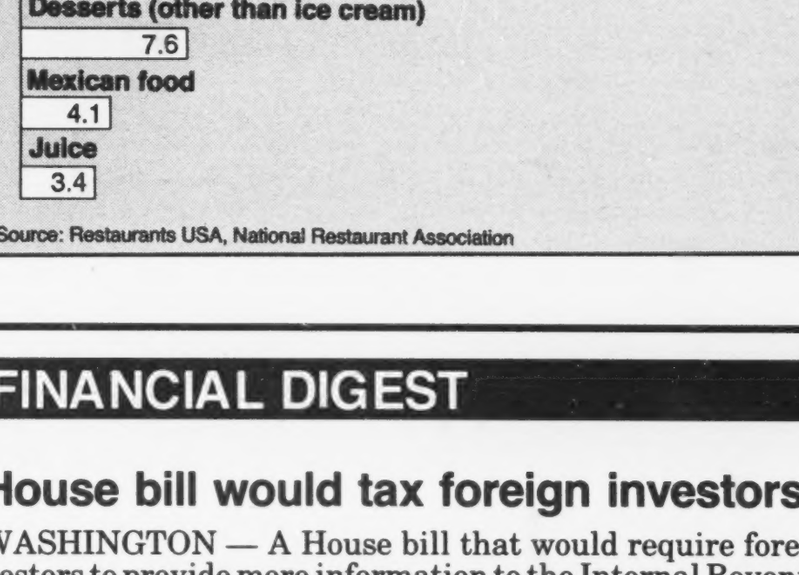
Canned Fancy **whole kernel corn** and **frozen cut corn** are in better supply than in the previous five-year average, and there have been truckload discounts on both.

Poor crop prospects in Thailand and a smaller than normal carryover is kicking up prices on 6/10 **pineapple** from that country. Production decline for this year is estimated from 8 percent to as much as 20 percent.

FACT FILE

Most popular restaurant foods for children under six

(in percent of eater occasions)



Source: Restaurants USA, National Restaurant Association

FINANCIAL DIGEST

House bill would tax foreign investors

WASHINGTON — A House bill that would require foreign investors to provide more information to the Internal Revenue Service for the purposes of assessing more taxes has been introduced by Rep. Dan Rostenkowski, D-Ill., chairman of the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee, and Rep. Richard Gephardt, D-Mo., the House majority leader.

Called the Foreign Tax Equity Act of 1990, the legislation is aiming to collect about $1 billion more in taxes from foreigners investing in the United States or doing business here.

The measure would grant the IRS new powers to secure information from foreign companies and their subsidiaries in the United States, and it would impose a 10-percent withholding tax on the sale of U.S. stocks by large-scale foreign investors except where bilateral tax treaties prevent such an assessment.

Applebee's hires adviser to study sale

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Applebee's International, operator of the Applebee's dinner-house chain, said it has retained a financial adviser to field acquisition offers.

The company said it has already received "feelers" from several parties interested in buying all or a major part of the operation. However, Applebee's stressed that no merger or sales negotiations are under way.

Piper Jaffray & Hopwood, the Minneapolis-based investment concern, has been hired to evaluate the overtures. It will also study alternative ways of enhancing stockholder value, Applebee's said.

Ark's 2nd-Q net income rises 255%

NEW YORK — Ark Restaurant Corp., operator and manager of 15 one-of-a-kind full-service but casual restaurants, reported a 255-percent increase in second-quarter net income on a 34 percent increase in total sales.

The company reported a $313,000 profit on sales of $11.3 million for the quarter ended March 31. For the six-month time frame, sales rose 27 percent, to $22.5 million, with a 55-percent increase in net income, to $567,000.

But income and fees from the five restaurants and bars the company manages declined. Sales from those five operations fell 3.2 percent, to $1.8 million, while management fees dropped 44 percent, to $137,000.

At a recent financial analysts conference, Ark president Michael Weinstein said the company's improved profitability is a reflection of the strengthening of the New York restaurant scene. Weinstein said the softness in New York's restaurant industry is over, and those businesses that survived, including his own, are filling in the vacuum from those that went under.

Weinstein said part of the the decline in fees and sales from restaurants managed by Ark but not owned by it has a lot to do with the softness in the Boston economy, currently experiencing similar falls in traffic that depressed Manhattan operators over the past year.

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Lights! Camera! Food!

Universal Studios battles Disney on the food front

by Jack Hayes

ORLANDO, Fla. — Challenging Walt Disney World's year-old Disney-MGM Studios for a bite of central Florida's 12 million yearly tourists, Universal Studios Florida opened its kitchens and dining rooms late last week — ready to serve 40,000 daily covers in more than a dozen restaurants.

"We're doing everything from hot dogs to grilled salmon with orange mignonette," said Steven Jayson, executive chef at the $600 million facility, which covers 450 acres a few miles north of the gigantic Disney complex.

The movie-themed feeding concepts — all of which are expected to double as sets for film and television production — range from 230-seat Mel's Drive-In from "American Graffiti" to the 380-seat Studio Commissary, a California-flavored fine-dining unit.

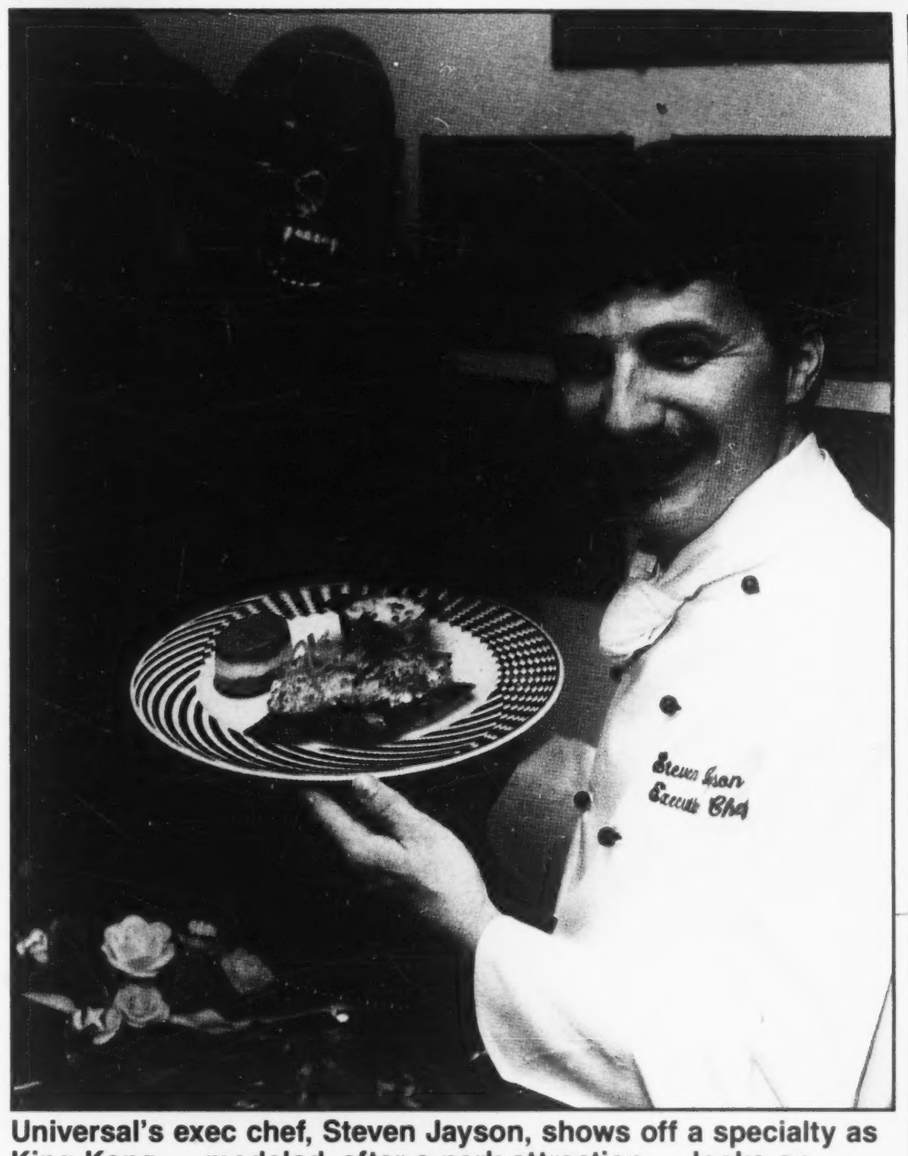
Mecca Leisure USA, the Orlando-based entertainment-dining group, is operating two major sites at the brand-new Universal attraction. Mecca Leisure owns Hard Rock International — which operates all Hard Rock cafes east of the Mississippi — as well as King Henry's Feast, Mardi Gras, Royal Orleans Restaurant and several other concepts here.

One of Mecca's operations, a guitar-shaped Hard Rock Cafe, anchors the studio complex. The other, Lombard's Landing, is a 400-seat fantasy seafood dinner palace with movie sets of both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

About 1,000 persons, 300 of whom are cooks, are employed to run the complex's foodservice operations.

Average checks, according to Jayson, are expected to range from a low of $4 at Mel's

(See UNIVERSAL, page 4)



Universal's exec chef, Steven Jayson, shows off a specialty as King Kong — modeled after a park attraction — looks on.

Eureka! Puck unveils brewery

Spago creator taps gourmet style for brew-pub concept

by Richard Martin

LOS ANGELES — Expanding the gastronomic bounds of the burgeoning brew-pub field, chef Wolfgang Puck and his partners have launched their ambitious Eureka restaurant and brewery.

Reflecting an $8.5 million investment and more than three years of research and development, Eureka showcases its lager and Puck's renowned culinary eclecticism in a dramatic, industrial dining environment created by his wife, designer Barbara Lazaroff.

The couple's other Los Angeles restaurants are the famed Spago and Chinois on Main, which in the 1980s helped inspire the trend to casual fine dining and popularize California-style cuisine, so-called gourmet pizza and Euro-Asian culinary fusions. Puck last year continued his string of successes by launching the acclaimed Postrio restaurant in San Francisco.

Devised by Puck and Eureka's executive chef, Jody Denton, the new restaurant's multicultural menu seeks to break new ground in the mating and cross-merchandising of fresh-brewed beer and fine food.

NRN Photo

Puck and Lazaroff

"Most brewery restaurants have been created for beer drinkers, and very little attention is paid to the food," asserts Puck, referring to the 150-odd smaller-scale operations in North America whose openings over the last five years have fueled a tenfold increase in the number of restaurants that brew their own beers.

"Wolf believes Eureka should be a restaurant, first

(See EUREKA, page 61)

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Florence Fabricant/Page 11

Restaurant empire-building
Charles Bernstein/Page 25

Violence hits hospitality industry
Rick Telberg/Page 26

The 'cold war' of frozen desserts
Focus/Page 29

Waiter steals the show at Ruggles Grill

by Tracey Woodard

HOUSTON — It is not unusual for a chef to generate a loyal following that, craving his particular culinary fare, will dine regularly at an establishment.

Ermis

Similarly, a restaurant's convenient location may siphon off flying-by customers who would rather eat near home rather than near Rome.

It is irregular, however, for service — especially one individual's service — to overshadow both of those factors and become a recognizable and quantifiable advantage to an establishment.

But at Ruggles Grill veteran waiter Geary Ermis is such a part of the restaurant's atmosphere that his pen-and-ink caricature graces the menus, matchbook covers and other paper paraphernalia.

Ermis, whose parents owned a restaurant in East Texas when he was a child, began working at Ruggles while a student in 1980. Now, 10 years later, he's still working for the restaurant and is still a student, but he hopes to graduate from the University of Houston in 1991 with a degree in hotel and restaurant management — or ancient Latin American history.

Though he's taken more than the usual amount of time to get a college degree, he's already matriculated in his waitperson studies because he learned a simple lesson.

STARS OF SERVICE
Operators rise to the challenge

First in a five-part series

"You have to give them what they want," said 37-year-old Ermis, "and you give it to them with a smile."

"Everybody today is oriented toward certain needs," he said, "and you can't balk. People don't have to come to your establishment."

(See RUGGLES, page 61)

Stars of Service set pace for the industry

More than ever, customer service is a critical issue in the industry.

This week Nation's Restaurant News launches a special series profiling those special operations we call "Stars of Service."

Each operation in this series addresses the issue differently. Some are implementing a range of sophisticated training programs. Others are looking for new ways to choose and motivate their waitstaff.

All of them are meeting the challenge and setting a standard for the industry to follow.

If you know of others who should be noted, write: Stars of Service, Nation's Restaurant News, 425 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022.